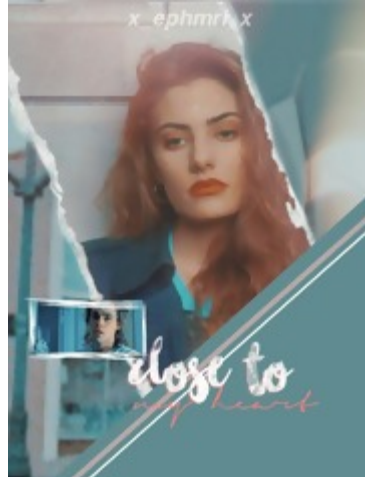


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close to
my heart

CLOSE TO MY HEART by x-ephmrl-x

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Summary: "You're sad , y'know that ? So fucking sad . And powerless . And lonely ." He's angry. She's got a nice smile. Both broken in some way. A cold night, shared cigarettes, and pacific words were all the comfort they needed.

1. Welcome Home

a/n: Hello, hello! Quick disclaimer— I do not own Stranger Things or its character. I only own my ocs and how this story goes. I imagine Diana kind of like a young Mädchen Amick when she was in Twin Peaks. Constructive criticism is welcomed! This was also posted on my Wattpad. Enjoy!

O1 | WELCOME HOME

December 6, 1984

Winters in Hawkins were Siberian, almost deadly— something Diana wished she'd remembered before they returned from Virginia. They'd only arrived two weeks ago, right after Thanksgiving. By then, frost had coated just about everything in sight. Now, it was early December and Hawkins had been hit with a good four inches of snow. School depended on how successful the road clearing went and the intensity of black ice. Diana prayed things would go smoothly.

She hadn't started school yet, thanks to all the boxes they needed to unpack. Most of it was unnecessary junk her mother *refused* to let go, or her older brother's things— which he definitely wasn't coming back for. If it were up to her, Diana would have thrown the wasteful things in the dump. Unfortunately, she didn't get a say in most things. Half the time, her parents were busy screaming at each other.

Just like now.

Diana stepped out through the back door, tightly hugging the two sleeping robes she wore around herself. Her hair was damp from a recent shower, some snow beginning to seep through her slippers as she stood. A light breeze brushed her skin in this unforgiving cold, her stormy grey eyes peering out into the darkness. She really hadn't thought this through. She'd been on autopilot when the argument began. Sadly, the walls weren't thick enough to muffle the yells— she was certain the whole neighborhood could hear.

Her teeth chattered while she tried thinking about something other

than the cold and her parents. Usually, she'd switch the radio to the rock station whenever Madonna didn't fulfill her needs, or she'd flip to a static channel on her TV— both distraction attempts had failed her miserably. Apparently, going outside hadn't helped as much as she'd hoped. It definitely was less suffocating, though.

She'd been shifting from one foot to the other for minutes now, trying to stay warm. The bang of a screen door being slammed shut caused her to nearly jump out of her skin. For a second, she thought her parents were going to drag her back into the house, until she looked to the side.

A full moon could only do so much at this time of night. The stranger's thumb roughly trailed the sparkwheel of his lighter, the small flame just enough for her to see just how gorgeous he was.

Diana hadn't realised how long she'd been staring until she heard his voice. "Like what you see, dollface?"

The girl blinked, registering his question. "No— I mean, yes—" she cleared her throat, "I *mean*, sorry. For staring."

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, the water from earlier having washed away the job she'd done on straightening her soft curls. She wasn't a shy girl, but this *damn* cold.

"I don't blame you. I wanna take a picture everytime I look in the mirror." Smoke followed the words that escaped his lips.

Gorgeous *and* a narcissist. Lovely.

The screaming match started again— she hadn't noticed it'd died down until their voices picked up once more. Her handsome neighbor seemed startled at the sound of a woman's voice, thinking his father had come after Susan (which honestly would've been a shocker).

"S . . . s-orry about them. That's why I came outside." Her teeth chattered a bit less, but not enough to do her justice.

"Same damn reason I'm out here. Similar situation, anyway." He let his arms hang over the wire fence that divided their crappy backyards, cigarette resting between his fingers. "I'm Billy, by the

way. Billy Hargrove. You new to town, baby doll?"

Ignoring his grin and the way his tongue traced his bottom lip, Diana was thankful for this distraction. "No, more like a . . . like a returnee."

"Shit, you're turning into that magic snowman." Billy held out a box of cigarettes and his lighter with his gloved hands, the coffin nail now bounded by his teeth.

Diana sharply sucked in a breath of air, keeping her arms tightly crossed over her chest. She shook her head, "No. No, I don't smoke."

If it wasn't for the smirk tugging at the corner of his lip, Billy would've looked annoyed— which she was sure he was. "C'mon, you're teeth are making me deaf here."

Another shake of her head. Billy raised his eyebrows. "You got three choices here, sweetheart. Either freeze to fucking death, go back inside, or take a damn fag. I take it options uno and dos aren't the most flattering."

"Yeah, neither is lung cancer."

Billy scoffed at her remark.

Diana hesitated, finally giving in as she slowly made her way towards the fence.. Her legs halfway frozen. With a cigarette now between her lips, she fumbled with the lighter, cold fingers making this all the more embarrassing.

A chuckle echoed in Billy's throat, the amusement in his eyes evident. He took the lighter and finished the job for her. "Don't breathe in too deeply if it's your first—"

His advice came too late and was drowned out by the girl's coughing and choking on the smoke. Billy muttered something under his breath while she cursed, but grinned once everything was under control.

"Toasty?"

She nodded.

"So, 'returnee'?" Billy asked, making air quotes. "And I never did get your name."

The brunette mentally slapped herself. "Diana! Marino. Name's Diana Marino."

"Ah. Pretty name for a pretty girl."

"If you like that, you should hear my number." Diana face palmed, nearly dropping the cigarette between her fingers. "That sounded so much better in my head."

Billy shook his head, saying he'd probably steal that line later. He barely knew her, and she hardly knew him— that was all he needed. A civil conversation with someone who wouldn't judge him, someone who didn't know what a fuck up he was. She'd find out eventually, the moment she'd step foot in school. Then she'd be like the rest of those mindless idiots.

But in that moment, ignorance was bliss.

Diana talked about the move to Virginia, which had taken place right before the 9th grade. She said the weather over there was just as bipolar as the people of Hawkins— which was saying a lot. She told him what she wanted him to hear rather than her whole life story. She figured he didn't care— just enough to acknowledge what she said.

Billy explained he'd recently moved into town sometime before Halloween. Apparently, he was born and raised in California. She asked if he knew how to surf. He did.

He also made it clear this shit hole of a town was nothing compared to Cali. She didn't disagree. Even if she'd never been, any place with a beach *had* to be better than Hawkins.

Then Diana attempted at impersonating your stereotypical, Mary Jane loving surfer. The cold made her horrid acting even more unsuccessful, and Billy seemed a bit annoyed, but he let her be.

Eventually, they retreated to the discomfort of the houses they refused to call home.

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Billy Hargrove— lady killer, flirt, new king of the court, and all around asshole. This definitely wasn't the boy she met last week on that dreadful Thursday night. Well, the flirt part seemed pretty obvious, definitely a lady killer. It was impressive how good he was at basketball. But a douchebag? She'd definitely been deceived.

When she attempted at greeting him in the hallway, he didn't even spare her a glance as he brushed past her. A few giggles were heard and she wasn't sure if they were directed towards her, or Billy. Judging by the look on the other girls' faces, they'd definitely been laughing at her.

Diana tried not to think much of it. Maybe he just hadn't seen her—that didn't make him an ass.

Billy then proved her wrong once again. At first, he'd shove a could of geeks into lockers, taking their lunch money.

How cliché of you, Hargrove, she thought to herself.

Then some vulgar name calling, more shoving, and— surprisingly— verbally attacked a few male teachers. Oh, but he was too sweet to all of the ladies.

Diana shared a two classes with him. Ignored once again. She knew they weren't friends, hardly acquaintances, but they'd talked over the weekend. She wasn't sure why she was getting all worked up.

Lies. She knew what was bothering her. It was the fact that he'd been so sweet before she started school. He did a complete one-eighty.

Two-faced bastard.

Lunch rolled around and finding a seat was difficult. She felt like that new girl in Virginia all over again. Luckily, there were less stares.

She'd packed her own lunch since money was pretty tight. School lunches here in Hawkins weren't exactly a hoot, so she wasn't missing out on anything.

"Diana? *Diana Marino?*"

The brunette had been so deep in thought, she hadn't noticed the girl who stood in front of her. Diana's brow furrowed, looking the girl up and down. Her confused expression slowly formed into one of surprise.

"Janice?! Wow. You look . . . *different.*"

Janice rolled her eyes, but smiled. "No, duh! I could say the same for you. Your butterfly hair clips are all gone and you no longer look like a rainbow."

"Your teeth are straight and your skin's way clearer," Diana commented. Both of them laughed, quickly embracing each other.

"Come! Sit with us." Janice grabbed her by the wrist and turned around, her black hair flipping as she did so.

Much to Diana's dismay, they passed Billy's table. For once, he looked at her. And *winked*. She suppressed a scoff and took the one second she had to flick his forehead, not seeing him tense after she elapsd.

Janice seated her at a table near a window, introducing Diana to the rest of her clique. Now, Diana wasn't great at memorising multiple names at once, but she did try. Janice did her best to catch her up on all of the recent gossip in school, as well as pointing out people who'd changed since middle school.

She'd told her about Steve and Nancy's rocky relationship, and how Wheeler had dumped him for Jonathan Byers— or something like that, quote on quote. There was a rumor that Nicole had lost her virginity during Tina's Halloween party— she also didn't fail to mention how *incredibly hot* Billy Hargrove looked that night. And Tommy became popular. Well, he'd always been popular, but now he definitely looked the part. Carol would always be out of his league— physically. She could be a bit ditzy.

"Are Nancy and Barbara still friends? I haven't seen Barb around her," Diana interrupted. Aside from Janice, she used to hangout with the two aforementioned girls. Three of them weren't besties, but they

invited each other to the occasional sleepover.

Janice tensed, chewing her lip. "Right. I thought you heard already. Sweetie, Barbara . . . well, she died. There was some chemical leak from this lab—"

She then continued to explain everything that happened— from Will Byers' disappearance, to the case of the mysterious Russian girl. Shocked would definitely be an understatement in describing how Diana felt. All of it sounded insane. She felt as if this was some weird thriller they had to read in English last school year. Except much more terrifying, and *real*.

The rest of the day went by in a blur. She still couldn't process everything that happened while she was gone. She considered paying Barbara's parents a visit, Nancy too, so she could pay her condolences. Diana decided against it. She was sure neither of them wanted to deal with the topic anymore.

Diana unlocked her bike from the rack, swinging one leg over the seat and began to pedal away. Unfortunately, her journey was cut short by a pair of hands holding her bicycle still. She glared up into his piercing blue eyes— damn it, they were even more beautiful in the daylight.

"Hell off my bike, Hargrove," she breathed, annoyed.

"What's with this new attitude, dollface?" He pressed, his own eyes boring into hers, challenging Diana.

She licked her bottom lip, shaking her head. "You're really something. You've got to be seriously bipolar. You talk to me all weekend, and then you act like I'm some sort of ghost until it benefits you?"

And there it was. He knew this would happen, he'd been waiting. He held his anger, a smirk used as a mask to hide how he was feeling. "I think I liked you better when you were halfway frozen and choking on smoke."

"Oh, real smooth. That get you far with the ladies?" Diana's grip tightened over the handles of her bicycle, not sure how to feel about

the hands that were over her own. "Let go of my *bike*, Billy."

The blond lowered his head to level with hers, his stare harder than dried cement. The intensity of Diana's glare faltered for a second. A few wolf whistles were heard, and for the first time, she appreciated them. As if on cue, Billy let go and stepped to the side.

"See you when you get home, sweet cheeks!" he hollered as she pedaled off.

2. Late Nights

A/N: Way overdue update, but I hope you enjoy!

The Tender Lovin' Café right at the end of Peony street with a misleading name. It was often referred to as "that diner off of Peony, y'know the one?" On multiple occasions have drunken town visitors stumbled in, the intense lack of strippers highly confusing— not there had been any to begin with. The place used to rival Benny's Burgers, business having picked up after the man's untimely death.

Diana had been overwhelmed by the amount of pink in the diner when she went to drop off her application. The entire thing seemed to be stuck in the 1953, save for the jukebox that only spouted disco hits and Bob Dylan. The fear that she'd have to use roller skates almost drove her away until Lorna (the owner) reassured her they'd gotten rid of the requirement ages ago. It had seemed like a good idea, but five too many injuries called for a change in plans.

She'd been against finding a job so soon after moving since she figured it'd only add on to the stress of settling in. Unfortunately, small things like opening boxes and putting away mugs seemed to trigger the most inane arguments from her parents. After school clubs weren't exactly her thing, hadn't been since she did cheer during her sophomore year. She couldn't handle the cliques that separated the school, and Hawkins High was no different. She settled for a job instead. Besides, it'd probably be a good idea to start saving money before summer started.

In just two weeks, she'd gotten the hang of just about everything. She knew how to handle the stupid and outdated espresso machine, had memorized the regulars' orders, and mastered a pokerface specially reserved for shitty customers. She was prepared for anything.

Or so she thought.

Not once did she think Billy would wind up at a place like this. Sure, all teenagers needed a designated hangout spot and this was one of them, but it definitely wasn't his style. She'd seen him with Tommy at

Lovers' Lake whenever Janice dragged her to a bonfire hosted by Tina, or Nicole. The boy never failed to have a beer in hand and a cigarette between his lips. If it wasn't the lake, it was in the hallway, or living room, or backyard of some rich Loch Nora kid who loved getting a reaction out of their parents. Any direct interaction she'd had with him consisted of stolen glances, Billy's attempt at flirting with her while getting a drink, and "watch it, Hargrove." She usually made it home before him, and when she did, she'd fail to catch herself waiting for the roar of his engine pulling up next to his dad's pickup. A lot of time, though, he ended up passed out on someone else's couch.

Billy Hargrove was *not* a tacky 50s diner kind of guy. Needless to say, Diana was a little more than surprised to see him stumbling in half past nine that night. He sat himself on a stool at the counter, head hung low and hands folded in front of him. No one else was in the diner, the previous customer having left about twenty minutes ago. It was a slow day, what with everyone busy settling back in now that the winter holiday was over. Her steps were hesitant as she approached him, a bit startled by his quiet and solemn demeanor. This couldn't have been the same kid she saw mere hours ago strutting about the school with yet another girl clinging to his arm.

She asked him for his order once she'd pulled out her notepad. A couple of long seconds told her he hadn't registered a word she'd said. With her pen, she tapped softly on the counter's surface, finally grabbing his attention. Her raised brow made him realize she'd been waiting on an answer for something. Logically, what he wanted to eat.

He'd never been to this place so he wasn't sure what was good and what wasn't. He was too prideful to ask for a menu.

Diana eyed his bloodied knuckles, then the forming bruise under his right eye. Gossip spread around Hawkins like wildfire and it'd only taken her two days to learn that he'd been the one to dethrone Harrington— over a stupid keg stand, another dick measuring contest. And it was no secret Billy had gotten himself into plenty of fights upon arrival. He'd yet to lose, and it certainly looked like he'd won this one too. What confused her was the lack of victorious energy.

She pursed her lips and spoke again. "Y'know, the burgers here are killer, and don't get me started on the strawberry milkshakes."

A chef's kiss from her emphasized her feelings towards the food.

Billy met her eyes and he wasn't sure if he should glare at her or thank her. Instead, he nodded. "Sounds good."

It didn't take too long and his order was set in front of him within minutes. He used the straw to swirl the whipped cream that topped his shake, looking mildly unimpressed with the rainbow sprinkles he was sure weren't a requirement. Three large bites and a sip later, the tension he held seemed to disappear (he had to hold back a moan after the first taste of his burger because it was, in fact, *that* good).

Diana had occupied herself with wiping the tables to avoid conversation, not sure what she would say if put on the spot. She'd checked on him once and cleaned the surfaces a second time. She hoped he didn't notice.

He did.

The second and third times he'd floundered into the diner had been no different than the first. 9:30 on the dot, his bruise and knuckles healing well.

The closest thing to conversation struck on night four. Diana had helped him with the math homework he'd brought, but only because she was asked to. Instead of giving him the answers, she showed him how to solve the equations. There'd been a lot of confusion on his part, so she figured out a way he'd understand.

The eighth night . . .

"C'mon, Marino, I'm literally *two* feet away from you," Billy groaned. He turned away from the four cherries that had landed behind him to give her the most annoyed look he could muster.

The brunette leaned against the counter that matched the pale blue of her waitressing dress. She rolled her eyes and licked the red juice from her fingers. It'd been twenty minutes since Billy arrived and they were the only ones yet again. At this time of night, the only

people to expect at the diner were strangers driving through and the Californian.

The two of them had occupied themselves with a jar of cherries that would be coming out of Diana's paycheck, throwing the fruits into the mouth of the other. Billy had hit his target *every single time* (he'd asked her to move back because her closeness was too easy). This wasn't the case for Hawkins' native resident. She'd failed horribly at the default distance Billy had set, and hadn't done much better with the two feet of space the counter had provided between them.

"There's a reason I didn't make the girls' basketball team in my old school," Diana grumbled as she closed the glass jar.

Billy raised a brow, clearly amused. "You tried out for basketball? I'd love to hear what happened."

As he leaned forward, she took a step back, her arms coming up to cross over her chest. "Story for another day. To sum it up, a ball came at my face and I ended up going home with a broken nose. I really wanted to do a sport that year."

She puffed out her cheeks, reminiscing the embarrassment that hosted her when she was a sophomore.

"They didn't have, like, a girls' volleyball team?"

Diana stared at him with wide eyes. "My nose got broken during basketball tryouts, Billy! What makes you think I wouldn't have made it out in a *bodybag* for *volleyball*?!"

The blond's hands shot up in surrender and he struggled to fight down a grin. Diana had muttered something under her breath, and he figured she was probably cursing him. She shook her head and peered at him.

Billy Hargrove was an enigma. During the day, he was this strange mix between jock and rebellious loner. He was a lady's man, always drove a different girl home every day. What she found hilarious was the fact that he was a *terrible*, absolutely *horrid* flirt. With most of the chics at their school, his good looks were enough to get them in the

backseat of his car. When it came to Diana, or Ally Gronkowski, or any girl that was *genuinely* uninterested in him (which weren't many), boy was he a wreck. He definitely thought he was being smooth, but Diana had cringed so many times at his attempts, she'd almost become afraid of having a permanent wince on her face.

At night, when he wasn't out scoring or getting drunk, he was this—this *dork* who said shit like "heebie jeebies," and "okie dokie." He'd put a quarter in the jukebox two nights before and she found out he knew all the lyrics to Dancing Queen. He'd also been very, *very* drunk then and revealed he could quote the first two episodes of *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. He had no memory of that night and she wouldn't bring it up until the fact could benefit her.

"See something you like?"

She wanted, more than anything, to slap that devious grin off his face. "Mhm. I'd like to see you pick those cherries off the floor because I have to close up."

Billy's eyes narrowed. "It's your mess."

"You're closer. And I blame your mouth for being so tiny."

"Not my fault you don't have aim."

Billy ended up cleaning the floor anyway.